

# Henry Drummond, evangelicalism and science

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Henry Drummond (1851-1897) was a prominent figure in the late Victorian evangelical world. In his day evangelicalism formed the mainstream of nearly all the Protestant denominations in the British Isles, certainly embracing Drummond's Free Church of Scotland. The movement typically placed emphasis on conversion and activism, and Drummond shared these preoccupations. Conversion is the central theme of his most celebrated work, *Natural Law in the Spiritual World* (1883). The natural man, he contended, is dead until he receives life from God. Likewise the call to conversion was urgent even in Drummond's addresses to London high society organised by Lord and Lady Aberdeen in the gilded ballroom of Grosvenor House during the spring of 1885.<sup>1</sup> Flowing from conversion was activism, an intense commitment to evangelistic and social work. After a week's lectures in Glasgow, Drummond would habitually return to Edinburgh for the weekend. His purpose was not to rest but to exhort a different set of students. In his writings he flays the laziness of ministers who, in order to preach, do no more than take down from their shelves their volumes of theology.<sup>2</sup> Instead they need to be active beyond the pulpit. In an address on "The Three Elements of a Complete Life" he identified two elements as God and Love: the third is Work.<sup>3</sup> Conversion and activism were as much the hallmarks of Drummond's career as they were of the evangelical movement in any age.

There is more room for doubt about whether he shared the movement's other two most salient characteristics, devotion to the Bible and to the cross. Drummond's addresses contain passages where he appears to deprecate biblicism. "I believe in Christianity", he told an audience of young men in America, "... not because I believe in

<sup>1</sup> G.A. Smith, *The Life of Henry Drummond*, 2nd edn. (London, 1899), 253-8.

<sup>2</sup> H. Drummond, *The New Evangelism and Other Papers*, 2nd edn. (London, 1899), 24.

<sup>3</sup> H. Drummond, *Stones Rolled Away and Other Addresses to Young Men delivered in America* (London, 1903), 184.

this book. I believe in this book because I believe in Christianity".<sup>4</sup> He composed no systematic expositions of the scriptures and accepted biblical criticism without reserve. Yet Drummond was preoccupied with the Bible. At one point in the argument of *Natural Law in the Spiritual World* the foot of the page is peppered with footnotes designed to vindicate the scientific prescience of the New Testament.<sup>5</sup> One of his posthumously published papers was entitled *The Evolution of Bible Study*. Its aim is to establish the hermeneutic principle that the Bible never reveals anything which human beings could discover for themselves.<sup>6</sup> If that position limits biblical authority in the sphere of science, its object is to entrench the status of the Bible as a medium of revelation. The old view of inspiration, he told the members of the Theological Society at the Free Church College, Glasgow, was now untenable, but the study of the inward character of its component books had restored the Bible to them.<sup>7</sup> The idea has an autobiographical ring. It seems that Drummond, though living through the critical reappraisal of the scriptures in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, emerged with a renewed zest for the Bible much like that of his friend and biographer, the biblical scholar George Adam Smith. He had come to believe in progressive revelation, an understanding which, he held, made the Bible "as impregnable as nature".<sup>8</sup>

In a similar way Drummond reformulated the doctrine of the atonement. Teaching about the significance of the crucifixion of Christ is much less prominent in Drummond's pages than in the writings of most contemporary evangelicals, and the more conservative among them criticised him on this score. On occasion he was willing to decry the whole doctrine.<sup>9</sup> Yet his purpose, as he makes plain in *Natural Law*, was not to turn attention away from the

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

<sup>5</sup> H. Drummond, *Natural Law in the Spiritual World*, 19th edn. (London, 1887), 296.

<sup>6</sup> H. Drummond, *The Evolution of Bible Study* (New York, 1901), 22.

<sup>7</sup> *New Evangelism*, 53-4.

<sup>8</sup> Quoted by Smith, *Drummond*, 237.

<sup>9</sup> *New Evangelism*, 27.

atonement but to warn against its perversion. It was vain, he explained, to suppose that a person was saved merely through knowing that Christ died for sinners. The doctrine might have "no more vital contact with the soul than the priest or sacrament, no further influence on life and character than stone and lime".<sup>10</sup> Empty words about the cross would not bring about authentic conversions. When rightly understood, however, the atonement did have power. Drummond held that new life had to be breathed into the doctrine. Thinking minds, he believed, were turning away from it because in its traditional form it was seen as inhuman, the vindictive killing of a son by his father. Drummond therefore reinterpreted the atonement as "the professed meaning and omnipotent dynamic of the law of sacrifice".<sup>11</sup> The ethical principle of sacrifice ran through the universe: the death of Christ was its supreme example. Drummond was producing a version of the moral influence theory of the atonement. That was unusual among evangelicals, but its author had no doubt that he was restoring the "central doctrine to theology".<sup>12</sup> He wanted to be not less, but more, loyal to the atonement. Despite the smaller stress in his teaching on the cross, as on the Bible, Drummond wished to remain within the evangelical movement, if necessary by stretching its boundaries.

He certainly possessed typical evangelical attitudes. The movement, which had secured the abolition of the slave trade in 1807, remained deeply hostile to slavery. Drummond detested the institution. In 1883 he followed in the steps of David Livingstone to the African interior, five years later publishing an account of his journey in *Tropical Africa*. In the preface he denounces the slave trade as "the open sore of the world". Arab merchants, he explains, enslaved carriers to take ivory to the coast, and so he advocates a drastic solution: "the sooner the last elephant falls before the hunter's bullet the better for Africa".<sup>13</sup> The extermination of the elephant would mark a stage in closing down the slave trade. British

<sup>10</sup> *Natural Law*, 331.

<sup>11</sup> *New Evangelism*, 58.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

<sup>13</sup> H. Drummond, *Tropical Africa* (London, 1888), 20.

ascendancy, furthermore, was essential in the region if it was to be saved from the curse of slavery. Drummond's book was one of the precipitants of the British declaration of a protectorate over Nyasaland – the later Malawi – in 1891. The passionate commitment to the anti-slavery cause marked Drummond as an heir of the evangelical tradition.

The evangelical movement as a whole is commonly supposed to have been hostile to science. During the nineteenth century, it is thought, its biblicism set the movement in opposition to the advance of science. Fresh discoveries showed that the world was much older than the Bible seemed to teach. There were apparently contradictions between Genesis and geology. Furthermore preoccupation with the natural world might look to evangelicals like a waste of time, a diversion from the priorities of the gospel. Thus there were protests from Scottish congregations when ministers preached about the work of God in creation because the theme seemed remote from his work in salvation, the proper subject for the pulpit.<sup>14</sup> So undoubtedly there were tensions between evangelicalism and science. Nevertheless the prevailing mood among evangelicals during the first half of the nineteenth century, the period before Drummond's birth in 1851, assumed a harmony between science and religion. Thomas Chalmers, the leader of the Free Church and first principal of New College, Edinburgh, enthusiastically attended an early meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science at Cambridge in 1833.<sup>15</sup> Round Chalmers there was a distinguished circle who combined evangelical theology with scientific practice: Sir David Brewster, a specialist in optics and eventually principal of the University of Edinburgh; John Fleming, professor of natural history at King's College, Aberdeen; and Hugh Miller, the ex-stonemason who popularised geological investigation. Paul Baxter has shown, in a doctoral dissertation on this group, that evangelicalism and science meshed closely together in their minds.<sup>16</sup> They confronted intellectual

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<sup>14</sup> T. Dick, *The Christian Philosopher*, 2 vols. (Glasgow, 1846), i, 26.

<sup>15</sup> W. Hanna, *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of T. Chalmers, D.D. LL.D.*, 4 vols. (Edinburgh, 1844-52), iii, 380-4.

<sup>16</sup> P. Baxter, "Science and Belief in Scotland, 1805-1868: The Scottish Evangelicals", unpublished University of Edinburgh Ph.D. dissertation, 1985.

problems, but equally they proposed satisfying solutions. The newly appreciated length of geological time, for example, was ingeniously reconciled with the first chapter of Genesis. A vast interval, according to Chalmers, may have elapsed between the creation of all things described in verse one and the ordering of the universe expounded from verse two. Alternatively, according to Miller, the six days of creation could be interpreted figuratively as long epochs of time.<sup>17</sup> Either scheme of harmonisation seemed to uphold the integrity of geology as much as of scripture. Science and religion were understood as part of the same divine world order.

How was this synthesis of knowledge possible? The explanation lies in the Enlightenment premises adopted by evangelical thinkers. They, as much as their contemporaries, pursued the scientific investigation of the world within an intellectual framework associated with the age of reason. Sir Isaac Newton, whose laws shed light in dark places, was their model. They exalted the method of induction, calling their own brand of Christianity “experimental religion”. Thomas Chalmers’ most famous sermons, the *Astronomical Discourses* (1817), praised Newton and gloried in the triumphs of the rational investigation of the heavens.<sup>18</sup> “Nothing”, he wrote in 1814, “can be more safe or more infallible than the procedure of inductive philosophy as applied to the phenomena of external nature”.<sup>19</sup> The tradition of natural theology underpinned the integration of science and religion. Stemming from John Ray and William Derham around the beginning of the eighteenth century, the tradition was most famously championed by William Paley around the beginning of the nineteenth. The natural world, it held, contained evidences of its creator, particularly in the indications of design.

When we look on a house [wrote Chalmers], with its numerous conveniences, we instantly pronounce it to have

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 71-2, 139-40.

<sup>18</sup> T. Chalmers, *A Series of Discourses on the Christian Revelation viewed in Connection with the Modern Astronomy*, 4th edn. (Glasgow, 1817), spec. Discourse II.

<sup>19</sup> T. Chalmers, *The Evidence and Authority of the Christian Revelation* (Edinburgh, 1814), 191.

been the fruit of contrivance, and that it indicates a contriver; and it is not for a different, but for the very same reason, that when we look on the world with its countless adaptations to the comfort and sustenance of those who live in it, we pronounce it to have been the formation of an architect of adequate skill for devising such a fabric, and adequate powers for carrying his scheme into execution.<sup>20</sup>

Everything has a purpose; therefore a purposive mind lies behind it; hence God exists. It seemed a powerful chain of reasoning, and one that could only magnify the wisdom, power and benevolence of the Almighty as investigation steadily revealed more of his handiwork. Scientific research vindicated Christian theism.

This worldview remained largely convincing, especially to evangelicals, in the mid-nineteenth century. Shortly afterwards, however, it was called into question. In 1859 Charles Darwin published *The Origin of Species* putting forward the idea of evolution. There had been previous proposals of a similar developmental kind. The evolutionary thought of the French naturalist Lamarck had been embraced in radical medical circles, especially in London, during the 1830s.<sup>21</sup> In 1844 Robert Chambers of Edinburgh had issued anonymously his *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation*, arguing that species are uniformly transformed from one to another. Both these innovations, however, were stoutly resisted by evangelicals in the name of the fixity of species. New College, Edinburgh, for example, established a chair of natural science in order to counter theories such as those of Chambers.<sup>22</sup> It was much harder to reject Darwin because of the formidable array of evidence he marshalled in favour of his case. The kernel of the Darwinian challenge to evangelicals was not the questioning of the detail of Genesis: various non-literal interpretations already existed and so could accommodate

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<sup>20</sup> T. Chalmers, *Institutes of Theology*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh, 1849). i. 91.

<sup>21</sup> A. Desmond, *The Politics of Evolution: Morphology, Medicine and Reform in Radical London* (Chicago, 1989).

<sup>22</sup> P. Baxter, "Deism and Development: Disruptive Forces in Scottish Natural Theology", in *Scotland in the Age of Disruption*, edd. S.J. Brown and M. Fry (Edinburgh, 1993), 106-8.

the new scientific understanding with relative ease. Rather the central problem lay in the implications for natural theology. If plants and animals could adapt to the environment of their own accord, the evidence for what Chalmers had called "contrivance" vanished. The Almighty, it seemed, was not the author of the physical features that appeared admirably designed for their purpose. The world no longer furnished proof of the Creator. The traditional defence of the existence of God collapsed, and with it the synthesis of science and religion.

Darwin, however, did not deliver a knock-out blow. There was, in fact, less impact on Christian opinion than historians used to suggest. James Moore has shown that most conservative Presbyterians in particular were able to absorb the new approach.<sup>23</sup> Many evangelical writers took Darwinism in their stride, simply expanding the scope of natural theology. Free Church thinkers were specially adept at assimilating evolution into a broader vista. John Duns, the occupant of the New College chair of natural science, for instance, believed that there must be a "frank acceptance of the law of development from lower to higher".<sup>24</sup> He was still able to assert the argument from design, contending now that whole systems rather than individual parts were adapted for their purpose by the Creator's oversight of evolution. Robert Rainy, the colossus bestriding the late nineteenth-century Free Church, had problems with no aspect of Darwinian teaching. In his inaugural address as Principal of New College, Edinburgh, in 1874, he stoutly asserted that no conceivable extension of the idea of evolution could undermine natural theology.<sup>25</sup> Lesser figures lacking Rainy's formidable dialectic skill, however, were often troubled by the challenge to the beliefs they had inherited. John Laidlaw, minister of the Free West Church in Aberdeen, claimed in 1879 that Darwin's principle of natural selection was incredible to believers in an ordered world.<sup>26</sup> Many evangelicals thought it

<sup>23</sup> J.R. Moore, *The Post-Darwinian Controversies: A Study of the Protestant Struggle to come to Terms with Darwin in Great Britain and America, 1870-1900* (Cambridge, 1979).

<sup>24</sup> J. Duns, *Science and Christian Thought* (London, n.d.), 122.

<sup>25</sup> R. Rainy, *Evolution and Theology: Inaugural Address* (Edinburgh, 1874), 9.

<sup>26</sup> J. Laidlaw, *The Bible Doctrine of Man* (Edinburgh, 1879), 39.

imperative to keep creation distinct from evolution. Many – often the same people – believed it essential to keep humanity outside the evolutionary sequence. And many – perhaps most – wanted to insist that the organic and the inorganic must be kept apart. The distinction between the living and the material must be preserved if there was still to be room for the spiritual and, in the last resort, God. Evolution seemed a threat on all three scores.

By the early 1880s, therefore, Darwin had set a question mark against several aspects of the received Christian worldview. In particular, he had spiked the most powerful gun in the evangelical armoury of apologetic, the argument of natural theology from design. Science in the hands of Darwin's militant colleague T.H. Huxley seemed to have turned decisively against religion. Anxieties were abroad in the churches. Drummond refers to his readers being "haunted now by a sense of instability in the foundations of their faith".<sup>27</sup> It was this apprehensive mood that hailed his *Natural Law in the Spiritual World* with relief. Here at last was an author to guide the perplexed in a fresh reconciliation of religion with science. The book achieved success. In the first five years after its publication in 1883 it sold 69,000 copies. By Drummond's death in 1897 there had been twenty-nine editions in Britain alone. By the end of the century there had been fourteen pirated editions in the United States.<sup>28</sup> Why should Drummond in particular have been able to meet the need of the hour?

In the first place, he was not only an evangelical but also an evangelist, a winner of souls. Drummond was not a professional minister. He did preach on a stated basis for a few months during 1876-77 at Barclay Church, Bruntsfield, in Edinburgh, but he soon abandoned pulpit work and later claimed that he had never delivered regular sermons.<sup>29</sup> He possessed no sense of call to the ministry and did not proceed to ordination immediately after his college course. He was eventually ordained in 1884 only because the step was a condition of assuming a chair of theology in the Free Church College

<sup>27</sup> *Natural Law*, xxiii.

<sup>28</sup> Smith, *Drummond*, 213. *The Times*, 12 May 1897, 10. J.R. Moore, "Evangelicals and Evolution: Henry Drummond, Herbert Spencer and the Naturalisation of the Spiritual World", *Scottish Journal of Theology*, xxxviii (1985), 386.

<sup>29</sup> J.Y. Simpson, *Henry Drummond* (Edinburgh, 1901), 52.

at Glasgow.<sup>30</sup> Again he later whimsically asserted that he had no recollection of his ordination; and he declared that he would never dare perform a baptism. He refused to use the title "Reverend".<sup>31</sup> Drummond therefore possessed a distinctly unclerical image. He was not a traditional minister attached to a settled charge.

Instead he belonged to the world of the travelling revivalist. In 1873, when he was only twenty-two and still studying at New College, Edinburgh, the American evangelists Dwight L. Moody and Ira D. Sankey arrived in the city to conduct a campaign. Moody had been a successful shoe salesman in the early years of the mushrooming metropolis of Chicago, a small-scale entrepreneur with a persuasive tongue. He had turned his skills to Y.M.C.A. work, selling the gospel to young men without price. Sankey was at his side to render rather plaintive sacred solos, or lead the audience in more rumbustious choruses, since his calling was "singing the gospel".<sup>32</sup> Here was work for a gifted but unconventional fellow such as Drummond, who threw himself into the Edinburgh campaign. Joining the American pair, he journeyed round the cities of Ireland and England as an additional speaker, especially to young men. He proved a particularly able counsellor of prospective converts in the enquiry rooms and was trusted to edit Moody's evangelistic addresses for publication.<sup>33</sup> So passed a whirlwind twenty months. Moody took Britain by storm, nowhere more than in Glasgow, where his visit stimulated the foundation of a battery of causes dedicated to gospel and welfare work. Drummond was wholly identified with Moody's achievement.

After the return of Moody and Sankey to America in 1875, Drummond returned to New College but did not give up mass evangelism. He hired the Gaiety Music Hall in Edinburgh on Sunday evenings, co-ordinating a series of addresses by his fellow-students

<sup>30</sup> Smith, *Drummond*, 246.

<sup>31</sup> J. Watson (Ian MacLaren), "Henry Drummond", *North American Review*, clxiv (1897), 521-2.

<sup>32</sup> J.F. Findlay, Jr, *Dwight L. Moody: American Evangelist, 1837-1899* (Chicago, 1969).

<sup>33</sup> Simpson, *Drummond*, 43.

and sometimes speaking himself.<sup>34</sup> He was to continue similar work in later life. In 1884, the year after the publication of *Natural Law*, there was a visit to Edinburgh by two of the "Cambridge Seven", university men volunteering to carry the gospel to China, giving up prospects of leisured privilege for the sake of arduous missionary adventure. Intense enthusiasm was stirred in the Edinburgh student body and Drummond was invited to keep the fires of spiritual excitement stoked up.<sup>35</sup> For ten years, on and off, he maintained a series of Sunday evening evangelistic addresses to undergraduates. Success in Edinburgh led to invitations to speak elsewhere: Oxford (1885), German universities (1886), Northfield, Moody's American conference centre (1887) and Australia (1890). Drummond became a renowned figure on the international evangelical circuit.

A qualification, however, needs to be made about his impact. Moody, it has recently been demonstrated, did sway working-class audiences in Britain and was seen as a herald of popular democracy.<sup>36</sup> Drummond, by contrast, had little appeal for the working people. They did not feel at home with him, according to a contemporary, because, unlike the populist Moody, Drummond seemed too refined.<sup>37</sup> He became a zealous advocate of the Boys' Brigade, founded in Glasgow in 1883 to instil discipline and religion into the urban masses as teenagers, but his contacts were far more with the officers than with the rank and file. The brigade, he once remarked, would have been worth starting "were it only for the sake of the young men who act as officers".<sup>38</sup> It was young men, and especially students, whom Drummond kindled. That meant, in the circumstances of the late nineteenth century, that his message found favour chiefly with an elite group. It was not that he ignored the welfare of the masses. In

<sup>34</sup> Smith, Drummond, 107-8.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 297-8.

<sup>36</sup> J. Coffey, "Democracy and Popular Religion: Moody and Sankey's Mission to Britain, 1873-1875", in *Citizenship and Community: Liberals, Radicals and Collective Identities in the British Isles, 1865-1931*, ed. E.F. Biagini (Cambridge, 1996).

<sup>37</sup> Watson, "Drummond", 518.

<sup>38</sup> J. Springhall *et al.*, *Sure & Stedfast: A History of the Boys' Brigade, 1883 to 1983* (London, 1983), 55, 42.

1889 he helped plan the Glasgow University Settlement, at which students mingled with the poor to give practical assistance.<sup>39</sup> He even (like many of his contemporaries) modified his theology, giving a larger place to the idea of the kingdom of God, a shorthand for social reconstruction on theological premises.<sup>40</sup> *Natural Law*, furthermore, was originally delivered as separate papers to a working-class audience at the Possil Park mission cause that Drummond served for four years down to 1882.<sup>41</sup> But the impact of the book was not on the working classes when it appeared in print. It satisfied a more educated reading public.

Drummond's message appealed to students because of its simplicity. He denied, for instance, that there was anything mysterious about becoming a Christian. As he put it to Harvard students on another visit to the United States in 1893, "you say, 'I shall follow this teacher and leader until I get a better'. From the time you do that, you are a Christian".<sup>42</sup> The more theologically sophisticated questioned such teaching, but its popularity was undoubted. Yet it was the image, even more than the content, that attracted packed audiences to hear Drummond. Dignified, smartly turned out, with angular features and a drooping moustache, he looked the ideal gentleman.<sup>43</sup> He delivered addresses in beautiful phraseology and his written style drew the warm commendation of even his sternest critic.<sup>44</sup> Like Gladstone, whom he followed in politics, Drummond possessed a commanding eye. His gaze would penetrate his hearers to the core.<sup>45</sup> Here was a man to respond to; and many did. Drummond's power as a preacher of the gospel, especially among the gilded youth, gave him the highest place in the evangelical pecking order, far above

<sup>39</sup> Smith, *Drummond*, 286.

<sup>40</sup> H. Drummond, "The Programme of Christianity", *The Greatest Thing in the World and Other Addresses* (London, 1894).

<sup>41</sup> Smith, *Drummond*, 135.

<sup>42</sup> Stones Rolled Away, 37.

<sup>43</sup> Simpson, *Drummond*, 147-8.

<sup>44</sup> "A Brother of the Natural Man" [James Denney], *On "Natural Law in the Spiritual World"* (Paisley, 1885), 6.

<sup>45</sup> Watson, "Drummond", 515-16.

any minister or theologian. His status as an evangelist goes a long way towards explaining the sustained sales of *Natural Law*.

Secondly, however, the welcome given to the book rested on the reputation of Henry Drummond as a scientist. The evangelist's background pointed him towards the sphere of science. He came from a Stirling family of seedsmen, plant breeders as well as suppliers. The members of the firm necessarily took an interest in matters of botanical nurture and classification. Drummond's uncle Peter, usually remembered for launching the Stirling Tract Enterprise, had also shared in founding the Stirling Agricultural Museum, for which, with his half-brother, he had been awarded the gold medal of the Highland and Agricultural Society of Scotland.<sup>46</sup> The young Henry spent a number of months assisting his father in the family firm, in the process imbibing some expertise in the science of plants.<sup>47</sup> This experience helps to explain a striking feature of *Natural Law*. The book does not, as one might expect, deal with natural science in general, but, as at least one critic noticed, it concentrates on biological processes alone.<sup>48</sup> The central theme is the "law of biogenesis", that only life gives birth to life. Biology was the scientific domain most familiar to Drummond and, at least in this field, he possessed deeply rooted knowledge.

During his education the evangelist took a variety of scientific courses. At New College, under John Duns, the professor of natural science, Drummond won the first prize in the subject, but in competing with candidates for the ministry the standard may not have been high. Previously, from 1866 onwards, he had pursued the diverse first-degree curriculum at the University of Edinburgh, passing in mathematics and physics, and in parallel with his mainly theological studies at New College he took botany, chemistry, zoology and geology in the university. Although he performed ably in the last two subjects, he twice failed to satisfy the examiners in natural science

<sup>46</sup> M.J. Cormack, *The Stirling Tract Enterprise and the Drummonds* (Stirling, 1984), 9.

<sup>47</sup> Simpson, *Drummond*, 33.

<sup>48</sup> "Brother of the Natural Man", *On "Natural Law"*, 22.

overall and so left the university without a degree.<sup>49</sup> It may well be that another aspect of his passage through higher education was more formative than the regular curriculum. At that time Drummond took up the characteristic late Victorian concern with psychic influences. Like Gladstone, he was fascinated by seances; he wrote a paper on "Mesmerism and Animal Magnetism"; and he practised hypnotism himself.<sup>50</sup> One student was so firmly under his hypnotic powers that when Drummond confronted him on the street, he would meekly surrender his watch at Drummond's suggestion.<sup>51</sup> There is early evidence of an interest in the borderlands of the spiritual and the psychological, the religious and the natural. Drummond's *Natural Law in the Spiritual World* was to be founded on the hypothesis that there is a firm connection between the two.

In 1877, after completing his New College training, Drummond was appointed to a lectureship in natural science at its sister Free Church college in Glasgow. There he concentrated not, as might be expected, on apologetics, but on basic science, even performing experiments.<sup>52</sup> He possessed some standing as a practising scientist, or at least appeared to do so. This feature of his reputation perhaps shows why he exerted a special influence over students of medicine in his weekend addresses at Edinburgh. For many years intending doctors had been notorious for boisterous behaviour, but under Drummond's sway, to the delight of the university authorities, they became more restrained.<sup>53</sup> Drummond's professional responsibilities also shed light on the appeal of his book. *Natural Law* was written by a man who earned his bread as a scientist.

What is more, in a typical late Victorian way, he went off on scientific expeditions. In 1879, with Archibald Geikie, formerly his professor of geology at Edinburgh, he travelled to Canada to examine the strata of the Rocky Mountains, receiving a Fellowship of the Royal Society of Edinburgh in the following year as his reward. In

<sup>49</sup> Smith, *Drummond*, 43, 30.

<sup>50</sup> Simpson, *Drummond*, 30.

<sup>51</sup> Watson, "Drummond", 516.

<sup>52</sup> Simpson, *Drummond*, 62.

<sup>53</sup> Watson, "Drummond", 522.

1883 he was commissioned to survey the natural phenomena, and again especially the geology, of the area between Lakes Nyasa and Tanganyika for the African Lakes Corporation. The result was a vivid account of much of modern Malawi and adjacent parts of Mozambique in *Tropical Africa* (1888). And in 1890, when visiting the New Hebrides at the request of Australian friends in order to observe the political and missionary situation, he also busied himself with scientific observations.<sup>54</sup> Drummond was known as a practitioner of science who enjoyed the confidence of the competent authorities. Although in most disciplines except geology he was no more than a gentleman amateur, he could be said to possess a certain reputation in the scientific world.

Hence evangelicals felt that they could look to Drummond with confidence on scientific matters. Even though *Natural Law* drew severe criticism from experts, their comments could be regarded as part of the give and take of professional debate. Drummond could airily open a public address with a quotation from T.H. Huxley, Darwin's assertively agnostic colleague, as though he were referring to an equal.<sup>55</sup> Huxley is cited seven times in *Natural Law*, and Darwin himself three times.<sup>56</sup> Drummond seemed at home in their company, respecting their views but upholding his own. So his message carried the greater authority. When he insisted in the book that there was a great gulf fixed between the organic and the inorganic, it appeared that a decisive verdict had been passed. Although Huxley entirely shared Drummond's conviction on this point, the most potent threat to Christianity from science seemed to have been abolished by this pronouncement. If there was no continuity between life and the material world, the universe could be fully understood only if there was room for the spiritual. There was still a place for God in his creation. The possibility of a wholly materialistic explanation of the world, long a serious alternative to Christian belief, seemed to be confuted by science itself. Drummond's addition of scientific

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<sup>54</sup> Smith, *Drummond*, chaps vii, viii, xv.

<sup>55</sup> H. Drummond, "The Changed Life", *Greatest Thing in the World*, 179.

<sup>56</sup> *Natural Law*, 23-4, 56, 63, 69n, 287, 289, 290-91; 97, 255, 292.

expertise to evangelistic ardour gave him a unique combination of qualities.

There was, however, a third reason for his celebrity. Drummond was a romantic – not in the sense that he was a quixotic adventurer, though there was an element of that quality in his make-up. Rather he was swayed by the rising intellectual influences of the nineteenth century, the currents of thought reacting against the Enlightenment of the previous century. Whereas the Enlightenment had exalted reason, romanticism appealed to intuition. Starting with the generation of writers of the turn of the century, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Sir Walter Scott and their circles, a new cultural mood gradually spread to a wider public. By mid-century, when Drummond was born, it was supremely embodied in Thomas Carlyle. It favoured the dramatic, the historic, the popular, the natural and the felt. Drummond's educated sensibility could hardly fail to be affected by this spirit of the age.

He duly reveals many leading romantic features in his thought. In *The New Evangelism*, a paper originally read to the Free Church Theological Society in Glasgow, for instance, he asks what is the leading human faculty. It is not, as had been supposed in the past, the faculty of reason; instead it is imagination.<sup>57</sup> The antithesis represents the contrast between the Enlightenment, the age of reason, and the romantic, the era of the imagination – and Drummond stands with the romantic. The tone of the new era is pervasive. For the age of reason, the dominant metaphor for the understanding of the world was the machine. The universe seemed to operate like a clock and even human society was treated as an intricate mechanism. For the romantic age, however, the dominant metaphor was the tree or the flower. Human beings in particular were pictured as growing like trees, or as gradually coming to flower. Drummond's biological language describes a scene where growth is everywhere. Human beings develop over time, just like plants in the vegetable kingdom. Jesus spoke about the lilies of the field, Drummond declares in a chapter on "Growth" in *Natural Law*, "to teach us how to live a free and natural life, a life which God will unfold for us, without our anxiety, as he unfolds the

<sup>57</sup> *New Evangelism*, 26, 28.

flower".<sup>58</sup> The prominence of the motif of growth sheds light on an apparently curious point about Drummond. Although he was so close an associate of Moody the revivalist, Drummond is said not to have fully understood sudden conversion.<sup>59</sup> In *Natural Law* he endorses the principle that people do become Christians instantaneously, but remarks that probably for the majority the moment is unconscious. Then, having insisted that new life normally originates at a specific juncture, he immediately stresses that "Growth is the work of time".<sup>60</sup> Development, not crisis, is his major theme, for human beings are like seedlings that eventually blossom into flower. "Salvation", as he puts it, "is a definite process".<sup>61</sup> Drummond was working from romantic premises.

That is because of the intellectual influences that played on him. It is true that the strongest individual factor in the genesis of *Natural Law* was Herbert Spencer, who provided the evolutionary framework of thought and who is cited far more than any other author.<sup>62</sup> Spencer, though stressing development, is not usually classified as a romantic. Other writers who moulded Drummond's thinking, however, belong in a strong sense to the romantic school. His eye for nature was sharpened by John Ruskin, the art critic celebrated as one of the greatest romantic prose-writers.<sup>63</sup> He quotes Ruskin in *Natural Law* and again at the opening of the preface to his later book, *The Ascent of Man*.<sup>64</sup> Drummond's mind was stimulated by the American Transcendentalists, the group that marked the first reception of romantic thought into the United States. Drummond found R. W. Emerson soothing and warmed to his optimism; W. E. Channing taught him reverence for God as a moral being. A favourite theological writer was F. W. Robertson of Brighton, the Carlyle of the

<sup>58</sup> *Natural Law*, 123.

<sup>59</sup> Simpson, *Drummond*, 43.

<sup>60</sup> *Natural Law*, 93-94.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

<sup>62</sup> Moore, "Evangelicals and Evolution".

<sup>63</sup> Simpson, *Drummond*, 31.

<sup>64</sup> *Natural Law*, 173; H. Drummond, *The Ascent of Man* (London, 1894), v.

Church of England.<sup>65</sup> And Thomas Carlyle himself is praised in *Natural Law* for his “eloquent preaching of the Gospel of Work”.<sup>66</sup> These writers shaped Drummond’s mind, giving it the characteristic romantic turn.

The symptoms of the romantic approach are evident in the substance of Drummond’s teaching. One is the prioritising of feeling over reason, the supposition that experience cannot be captured in words. It leads to a distinctly anti-doctrinal position. In *Natural Law* Drummond remarks at one point that the worst enemy of a living church is “propositional theology”.<sup>67</sup> He constantly downgrades doctrine in the scheme of things. The New Evangelism, he says, must not be doctrinal.<sup>68</sup> Religion, he claims, is not a matter of thinking but of living.<sup>69</sup> In part this aspect of his message is of a piece with his unclerical stance: there is no need for the technicalities of professional theological terminology. At a deeper level, however, it is typical of the late nineteenth-century eagerness to repudiate sharply defined doctrine. The tendency was clearest among Unitarians and Broad Church Anglicans, but it was also evident among broader evangelicals. Religion, for these people, was a thing of beauty that could be damaged by any reduction to hard logical sentences. Drummond expresses this mood to the full in the pages of *Natural Law*. He deplores attempts to set out “cut and dry” theology and actually praises “vagueness” as a sign of truth. “You cannot live on theological forms”, he contends, “without ... ceasing to be a man”.<sup>70</sup> This aversion to doctrine locates Drummond within a romantically inspired trend of the times.

Insofar as he did express doctrinal views, he seemed suspiciously broad – especially to the Highland presbyteries of his church that censured him for heretical tendencies.<sup>71</sup> Drummond, for example,

<sup>65</sup> Simpson, *Drummond*, 32.

<sup>66</sup> *Natural Law*, 349; Carlyle is also cited at pp. 7-8, 316 and 341.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 360.

<sup>68</sup> *New Evangelism*, 20.

<sup>69</sup> *Stones Rolled Away*, 33.

<sup>70</sup> *Natural Law*, 360, 363.

<sup>71</sup> Simpson, *Drummond*, 96.

dismissed the federal theology of seventeenth-century Calvinism as “an elaborate rationalism”.<sup>72</sup> In keeping with his reaction against the Enlightenment, reason must not rule. Hence his message could be remarkably liberal for its day. Unlike most evangelists, for instance, he rarely spoke of the need for repentance.<sup>73</sup> The weakness of his teaching on sin, in fact, induced certain other evangelists to refuse to appear on the same platform with him. The orthodox at Moody’s Northfield Conference in 1893, Drummond reported, “fell upon me and rent me”.<sup>74</sup> And there were other indications of an advanced theological position. In *Natural Law* Drummond cites the American liberal Congregationalist Horace Bushnell and the English Unitarian James Martineau with equal approval.<sup>75</sup> Likewise Drummond treated J.R. Seeley’s *Ecce Homo*, which had alienated evangelicals on its appearance in 1865 for describing Jesus in solely human terms, as an invaluable work: he called it his “stand-by”. Drummond was even willing to repudiate an article of the creed, for he rejected the doctrine of the resurrection of the body as too materialistic.<sup>76</sup> The spiritual must take precedence over the physical. The liberal tendency should be seen as another effect of his romantic approach to the Christian faith.

If this cast of mind explains why theological conservatives were wary of Drummond, it also helps to show why *Natural Law* made so profound an impression. The old harmonisation of science and religion through a natural theology grounded on Enlightenment premises had, as we have seen, been undermined. Drummond presented an alternative version of natural theology based on fresh romantic presuppositions. The inherited static, mechanistic categories were replaced by dynamic, organic views. The Free Church theologian James Denney, who clung to an Enlightenment worldview predicated on hard facts, found *Natural Law* an entirely unconvincing work. It was, he concluded, “a book that no lover of men will call

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<sup>72</sup> *New Evangelism*, 27.

<sup>73</sup> Watson, “Drummond”, 523.

<sup>74</sup> Smith, *Drummond*, 421.

<sup>75</sup> *Natural Law*, 140, 168.

<sup>76</sup> Simpson, *Drummond*, 155, 154.

religious, and no student of theology scientific".<sup>77</sup> Drummond's writings were entirely alien to Denney. To an evangelical public that had read Scott and Carlyle, Wordsworth and Ruskin, however, *Natural Law* came as a breath of fresh air. Here, notwithstanding the doctrinal imprecision, was a vision of the universe as process. Evolution was its method, but God was in charge. Drummond's book offered a new type of natural theology, bringing together science and religion on fresh intellectual premises. His synthesis suited a climate of opinion suffused by romanticism.

Of Drummond's other writings, *The Ascent of Man* (1894), the evangelist's Lowell Lectures at Harvard, was less successful than *Natural Law*. It contended that the selfish struggle for life revealed by Darwin was accompanied by something altruistic, the struggle for the life of others, in both nature and humanity. In the end, Christianity and evolution were one because both produced love.<sup>78</sup> As Drummond's obituarist in *The Times* admitted, the book was severely criticised by scientists and theologians alike.<sup>79</sup> It was not a foundation of his fame either in his own day or subsequently. It has been suggested that another legacy was more important than either *The Ascent of Man* or *Natural Law*. Drummond's lecture on the paean to love in 1 Corinthians 13, *The Greatest Thing in the World* (1890), sold even more widely than *Natural Law* and is still in print today.<sup>80</sup> The booklet has been an enduring source of Christian devotional inspiration. Nevertheless it has much less significance for wider developments in the world of thought. *Natural Law*, by contrast, stands as a landmark in the relations of religion and science.

What, then, accounts for its popularity? Henry Drummond wrote at a time when traditional natural theology had been fundamentally challenged by Darwin. The argument from design that was so convincing to minds steeped in Enlightenment assumptions had been evacuated of persuasive power. Christians found that science now

<sup>77</sup> "Brother of the Natural Man", *On "Natural Law"*, 67.

<sup>78</sup> *Ascent of Man*, 438.

<sup>79</sup> *The Times*, 12 March 1897, 10.

<sup>80</sup> J. M. Wysong, "Henry Drummond", in *Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology*, ed. N.M. de S. Cameron (Edinburgh, 1993), 258.

posed a formidable threat to religion. To many in the international evangelical movement Drummond seemed to provide an answer. He was an evangelist and therefore trustworthy; he was a scientist and therefore authoritative; he was a romantic and therefore supplied a new integration of science and religion suited to the taste of the times. In the end, he may have failed to convince his more discerning readers. Others, such as the Anglo-Catholic theologian Aubrey Moore, may have slotted evolution into a Christian worldview far more satisfactorily.<sup>81</sup> Yet at a particular juncture Drummond was the man of the hour. Evangelistic work, the practice of science and romanticism: in the late Victorian years these three seemed to constitute a triple cord that could not easily be broken.

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<sup>81</sup> A. L. Moore, *Science and the Faith* (Oxford, 1889).